

Millville Manufacturing Company
Wheaton Industries
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
Between Columbia Avenue and the Maurice River,
Southeast of Union Lake
Millville
Cumberland County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1198

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MILLVILLE MANUFACTURING COMPANY
(WHEATON INDUSTRIES)

HABS No. NJ-1198

Location: Between Columbia Avenue and the Maurice River, Southeast of Union Lake, Millville, Cumberland County, New Jersey

Significance: The Millville Manufacturing Company complex, one of the commercial legacies of the Wood family, is indicative of the vast manufacturing and industrial activities in Millville, which peaked during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Much remains of this business today, as it is incorporated into the Wheaton Industries complex.

Description: This interwoven complex of nineteenth-century brick industrial buildings is difficult to dissect, since extensive access to the property was not possible, and the buildings are appended to one another in a somewhat baphazard manner.

One of the largest single structures is long, rectangular, partially banked, two-and-one-half-stories high, with a gable roof. The structure is probably framed with non-load-bearing cast-iron members; the exterior walls of the first floor are brick covered with stucco, while the upper areas are exposed brick. The gable end is arranged into seven recessed bays: the ground level features three pairs of boarded-up pairs of windows and one slender doorway; the second floor has five window openings, all but one containing paired nine-over-nine-light, segmentally arched double-hung sash; the gable story has a centered decorative glazed semi-lune, flanked by segmental quarter-lunes in the adjacent bays, and a date plate that is obscured by vines. The side walls are articulated by recessed panels that on the second floor contain alternating paired fenestration like the gable end, with single twelve-over-twelve-light sash. There is modest corbelling along the cornice. Many of the window and door openings are missing and/or boarded up. Ventilation stacks are found on the roof slope.

This structure is surrounded by other one- and two-story accretions and buildings that have been linked together, including the pump house used by the cotton mill.

History: During the colonial period, settlers in South Jersey utilized the resources of the area not only to create a self-sufficient economy for themselves, but also to facilitate the break away from the British government. With the products made from iron foundries, mills, and glass factories, the colonists no longer relied upon agriculture as a single source of income. The early industries in South Jersey include: glassmaking, ironworks, grist mills, sawmills, cedar mining, charcoal burning, and brickmaking. Many of these enterprises were sustained well into the nineteenth century, though others did not survive the industrial revolution.

Prior to the founding of Millville, Henry Drinker and Joseph Smith purchased 24,000 acres of woodland here, built a dam, and formed the Union Company whose main product was lumber cut at the water-powered sawmill and floated downriver. In 1795, Joseph Buck, Eli Elmer, and Robert Smith bought the Union property. Buck then planned the city of Millville--slated to contain mills and other industries fueled by water passing over the dam. Many mill and factory owners here gained access to the nearby waterpower by digging canals to their property. The town was laid out to facilitate the erection of mills on every possible tract along the river, with manor houses situated on higher ground to the east. His plans show streets extending from Smith to Broad streets, and from Buck to Fourth streets along the river. As Buck planned, Millville's first residents established themselves on the east side of the river, though as more people settled there, houses were built on the opposite shore, too. Millville was incorporated in 1866.

Buck's plans for the city became reality when David Wood and Edward Smith established Smith and Wood Iron Foundry (see David Wood Mansion, HABS NJ-1197). David's brother, Richard, added to the family prosperity by establishing a cotton mill next to the foundry in 1854. The business operated as New Jersey Mills until 1860 when a bleachery and dye house were added, whereupon it became Millville Manufacturing. Upon establishment of the bleachery and dye house, Wood then constructed a new dam, creating the largest manmade lake in New Jersey. The water power from the dam allowed the mill to produce its own electricity in the late nineteenth century. By 1870 the mill had 25,000 spindles, 500 looms, and 600 employees. Thirty-nine years later the number of employees had doubled.

Many Millville Manufacturing employees lived in homes constructed by the Wood family in the surrounding area. Moreover, they shopped at the company store located on Columbia Avenue next to the Wood Mansion. The company also constructed a wood bridge across the Maurice River to shorten the distance for those workers who lived on the western shore. Though the worker housing exists today, many of the industrial buildings associated with Millville Manufacturing do not. However, buildings connected with the foundry exist, including the pump house used by the cotton mill.¹

Sources:

Jones, Jean. "Millville Manufacturing Company: A Foundation For Industry." Millville News, 25 February 1991.

Sebold, Kimberly, and Sara Amy Leach. Historic Themes and Resources within the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail: Southern New Jersey and the Delaware Bay. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991.

Project Information: The project was sponsored by the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail (NJCHT) of the National Park Service, Janet Wolf, director. The documentation was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert Kapsch, chief, under the direction of Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian. The project was completed during summer 1992. The project historian was Kimberly R. Sebold (University of Delaware). The photography was produced by David Ames, University of Delaware, Center for Historic Architecture and Engineering.

¹ Jean Jones, "Millville Manufacturing Company: A Foundation For Industry," Millville News (25 February 1991), 18.